

# The Three Biggest Mistakes Executives Make When Leading Behavioural Change

Why is it that leaders frequently fail to hold people in their organisations accountable for their behaviour? Implementing such recognised measures as performance management, job design, program evaluation, risk management, and planning to achieve better job performance, furthermore, consistently fails to deliver it. The basic problem is that it can be profoundly difficult for leaders to change their own behaviour, let alone influence sustained behavioural change in others. Three basic mistakes contribute to this problem.

## Failure to Confront Problem Behaviour

Leaders such as you want to be liked as much as anybody else does, so you're likely to delegate the distasteful job of confronting people about their behaviour to other people or to business systems. Good leaders, after all, are supposed to delegate. The trouble is that although business systems can deliver for hard outcomes, they consistently fail to do so in regard to confronting behavioural shortcomings, teamwork problems, and sustained change.

An expert in leadership coaching and development named Marshall Goldsmith discovered an interesting paradox. Although you may think that people will like you more if you avoid conflict situations with them, they actually respect you more when you face up and deliver the truth with compassion.

Good leaders frequently engage external consultants and executive coaches to help make serious breakthroughs in such matters, as appropriately trained coaches can gather data and provide you with objective feedback honestly and confidentially. Executive coaches and consultants, furthermore, can also help successful leaders to improve their capacity to hold their direct reports accountable for delivering long-term, sustained behavioural change.

## Over-Reliance on Outdated Performance Management Systems

The traditional performance-management process is inherently problematic as a tool for sustained behavioural change and cultural alignment. The Taylorist school of management originally developed this process within industrial-age organisations in which organisational control was the norm and managers assumed the role of being judge, jury, and sometimes executioner. This disempowering model undermines the goals of those modern organisations for which competition and rapid change demand a culture that encourages employee discretion, responsiveness, and innovation, these being the factors that drive sustained positive change.

Effective modern organisations have the capacity to respond to change with speed and agility. People who have a deep personal connection with their work and a sense of control drive such organisations. They've tapped into their own motivations and problem-solving skills and feel empowered to make a difference.

External coaches can help you shape your organisation's behaviour and culture so this can happen by providing objective leadership-performance feedback from multiple sources, helping you to understand and apply the latest techniques for promoting positive organisational cultures, and shifting the balance of your performance conversations from feedback about the past to the more empowering technique of feed-forward for the future.

## Leaders Preaching Teamwork But Not Demonstrating it in Practice

The senior leadership team's behaviour is the ultimate model of any organisation's values, culture, and teamwork. Although leaders can be adamant about their walking the talk, many are often unaware that other people see the situation differently.

We can understand why this discrepancy exists between how leaders perceive themselves and how others see them by examining the career paths of many senior leaders. Three things have probably played a role in most senior leaders achieving their present status. You've probably demonstrated significant specialist or generalist expertise, an ability to lead others within your area of expertise, and, more elusively, an ability to manage up, to understand the big picture, and to become noticed by being in the right place at the right time.

When senior leaders arrive at the top, however a potential problem emerges. Open and honest collaboration with peers, who were also rivals, is unlikely to be a factor in such career-ladder climbs. This, then, becomes the final challenge for those on a senior team leading major organisational-cultural change. The qualities of self-reliance and achievement that had been invaluable for reaching the top can damage your effectiveness by reinforcing rivalries and operational silos between business areas, thereby undermining the ability to demonstrate cohesive teamwork, culture, and leadership.

As a senior leader you can ill afford to dismiss your need to operate as part of a cohesive senior team and expect other teams within your organisation to operate cohesively within and across business units. Experienced consultants and coaches can introduce simple techniques to help senior teams confront the part that their own behaviour and language has played in undermining the culture and values they espouse – often with profound results.

In order to achieve such results, exemplary organisations use executive coaching as the most powerful component of their leadership development and organisational-change toolkit. Organisations and senior leaders who seriously want to improve find that the benefits of focussed coaching programs for leadership teams are undeniable. Such programs help you to learn:

- ✓ what conversations you aren't having in your business and what that is costing you,
- ✓ how your senior team can unlock its capacity to create a positive, high-performing organisational culture in which people want to work,
- ✓ how to know if you're walking the talk and what to do about it if you're not,
- ✓ how to make change last without your having to be there all the time, and
- ✓ how to feel more confident as a senior leader.

For a confidential discussion about discovering whether an executive-leadership coaching program would make a difference for your organisation, call 02 9599 6791 now, or email [di@humanresourceschange.com.au](mailto:di@humanresourceschange.com.au).

To Your Success,

## **Di Worrall**

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*“The insight I gained into myself from Di’s coaching was truly eye opening. I gained clarity with regard to my strengths, and more importantly, discovered areas of potential improvement that I was previously unaware of. Once identified, small changes was all it took to produce significant positive results. I highly recommend Di’s coaching to people who are serious in exploring continuous self improvement.”*

**Mark Migallo**

ANZ Channel Development Manager,  
Sun Microsystems

*P.S. I am one of only around 37 people worldwide who is accredited to apply a powerful Australian profiling tool which can actually measure the core leadership traits that are crucial to engendering trust and leading behavioural change. A breakthrough in leadership development and pre-employment screening, the Integrity & Values profile measures traits such as accountability, personal responsibility, vision and truthfulness.*

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